Here Is 'Report from the South'

The Southern PATRIOT

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Stories of Voting Restrictions Stir Washington

By Staff Correspondent

WASHINGTON, D. C.—All of Washington was stirred by reports on voting restrictions presented at a conference here April 27.

An interracial audience of more than 1,000 heard first-hand accounts by leaders in the civil rights movement from nine states in the South.

Washington newspapers and broadcasters gave full coverage to the event, while the news services carried long articles for use throughout the nation.

A delegation took copies of the reports to the Civil Rights Commission and the Department of Justice on April 28. Delegates to the Conference visited their Senators and Representatives to urge speedy action to end violations of voting and registration rights.

Copies of the reports were also made available to labor, religious, civic, youth and fraternal groups that expressed great interest in them. (Summaries and excerpts from the reports are on Pages 2 and 3 of this issue of *The Patriot*.)

The conference, which was coordinated by the Southern Conference Educational Fund, was held at Asbury Methodist Church. Those attending adopted resolutions pledging full support to the men and women who made the reports—and who are working in their home states to win full voting rights.

The delegation from the conference met with Gordon Tiffany, who at that time was awaiting Senate confirmation as staff director for the Civil Rights Commission.

Tiffany told the delegation he was encouraged by the interest shown by the Conference on Voting Restrictions in Southern States. He said he and his staff would be happy to cooperate with those making the reports. He urged members

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The success of the Washington Conference was due, in large part, to the efforts of the hard-working Committee on Local Arrangements and to many other organizations in the Washington area which helped publicize it. SCEF takes this opportunity to thank all these people and organizations for the contribution they made.

REPORTS ON VOTING RESTRICTIONS in eight Southern states are presented to Gordon Tiffany, staff director for the Civil Rights Commission in Washington, by the Rev. John LaBauve, left, pastor of St. Gabriel Roman Catholic Church, Mound Bayou, Miss., along with a letter urging speedy action by the Commission. Others are, from left, Mrs. Eleanor Chandler, Cambridge, Mass., former Democratic National Committeewoman and a leader in the National Council of Negro Women; Bishop Edgar A. Love, SCEF vice-president and chairman of the Washington Conference on Voting Restrictions, and the Rev. Ben F. Wyland, executive secretary of the Florida Council for Racial Cooperation and SCEF board member who made the report from Florida. About 25 people, including representatives from most of the Southern states as well as New York and Massachusetts, formed the delegation to Tiffany's office on April 28.

Political Realignment Predicted

The struggle of Southern Negroes to win the right to vote could be the activating agent which will bring about a "long-delayed political realignment of the two political parties on all the great issues of the day," Aubrey Williams told the Conference on Voting Restrictions in Washington.

In the conference keynote address, Williams noted that the Republican Party at present has its "moderate" wing and its "conservative" wing, whereas the Democratic party is divided between the "liberals" and the Southern "oligarchy."

"The right wing of the Republican Party and the Southern oligarchy have everything in common except the names by which they are called," he said. "The results for the American people . . . are that the reactionaries in the two parties always effectively get together on anything really important to their interest and the "liberals" in both parties either split over political lines or are unable to put together a sufficiently large number of votes to pass legislation in line with their respective professions and promises."

Once enough congressmen see how great is their personal interest in the issue of full citizenship rights for the Negro, Williams went on, they must take the only course open to them—which is simply full-fledged support of the Supreme Court's position.

"They will seal the doom of the Southern oligarchy or drive them into the Republican Party where they really belong," he said. "By the same token, the 'liberals' in the Republican Party will be forced in the interest of self-preservation to support the Court and will face the necessity of finding working relationships with the 'liberals' in the Democratic Party."

"We must recognize the Negro's struggle for what it is—the spearhead which

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Reports Summarized

Southern Registration Proceeds, Despite Obstacles

Following are summaries and excerpts from reports made at the Conference on Voting Restrictions in Southern States, held April 27 in Washington, D.C.:

Alabama

Trickery and delaying tactics by Boards of Registrars, along with threats of economic reprisals and physical harm, keep the numbers of registered Negro voters low in Alabama, Charles G. Gomillion, president of the Tuskegee, Ala., Civic Association, reported.

He cited the following devices by Boards of Registrars :

Each registration applicant is required to fill out a questionnaire with 21 questions; in some counties, if he makes a single mistake, his application is not approved and he is never notified.

In some counties, boards of Registrars do not work full days or they fail to meet for weeks at a time. Sometimes registrars retard the process by holding conversations with applicants. Some boards have resigned rather than register Negro applicants.

Some boards require Negro applicants to secure white voters to vouch for them; often Negroes find it impossible to find white vouchers. Where Negro vouchers are allowed, they are sometimes allowed to vouch for only two or four applicants per month.

Many Negroes who do succeed in registering fail to vote. Sometimes this is because of their own lack of awareness of the importance of voting, Gomillion said. More often it is because those who work for whites are not allowed time off to go to the polls, or because they have been threatened that harm will befall them and their families. Negro businessmen who vote have often been forced out of business because wholesale dealers refuse to sell them commodities.

In 1956, Negroes represented 30% of Alabama's population but only 6% of its registered voters.

Louisiana

Purges of Negro voters from the rolls in Louisiana have often been effective because they are carried out strictly according to ancient laws, reported Kenneth Walker, publisher of the Colfax, La., Chronicle. Old and tricky stipulations on the filling out of registration blanks are simply enforced.

It is possible to render the purges ineffective if people know they are going on—as the law provides for fairly simple means of reinstatement on the rolls. In Walker's own parish, Grant, his newspaper covered such a purge honestly and fully, and 64 per cent of those purged were reinstated in time to vote.

The purges have been politically as well as racially inspired. Generally speaking, the Long faction in Louisiana politics gets the Negro vote, and the opposition to Negro voting comes from the anti-Long faction.

Despite the purges, Negro registration in Louisiana is increasing and now represents 16 per cent of the white vote. In 1952, 23 out of 64 parishes had no Negro registrants. Now there are just four such parishes. Hot segregationist candidates have fared badly recently in Louisiana elections.

Baltimore

What can be done—at least in a Border state—when people are determined to increase their voting strength has been demonstrated by a successful voter-registration drive in Baltimore.

In a report prepared for the Conference on Voting Restrictions, Dr. John L. Tilley stated that more than 15,000 voters have been added to the rolls in that city in 12 months. Dr. Tilley is pastor of the New Metropolitan Baptist Church, Baltimore, and served as chairman of the registration campaign.

Dr. Tilley said the drive was set off by refusal of the Baltimore City Council and the Maryland State Legislature to pass civil rights legislation presented to them. It was spurred by statements that councilmen and legislators considered the Negro vote of no significance.

The campaign was conducted under the leadership of the churches and carried out by house-to-house canvassing on a ward and precinct basis. Dr. Tilley said his committee plans to follow up with a similar thorough drive to acquaint registered voters with the importance of using their ballot and with the record of candidates and the issues involved in each election.

Dr. Tilley's report was read to the Conference by Bishop Edgar A. Love of Baltimore when Dr. Tilley was unable to attend in person.

Florida

"Go ahead and register if you can take what comes afterward."

This is what courthouse loungers tell prospective Negro registrants in one north Florida county, according to a report from the Rev. Ben F. Wyland, executive secretary of the Florida Council for Racial Cooperation.

Wyland said there are five north Florida counties where only 110 of 16,533 Negroes of voting age have been able to register. In Florida as a whole, 148,036 out of 369,463 Negroes of voting age are registered.

Wyland quoted a letter from the Rev. Dee Hawkins, who registered in Liberty County. "They are causing me to leave home," Hawkins wrote. "I was bombed-shot out of my home." He fled Liberty County, Wyland said.

By contrast, in Madison County there are now over 1,000 Negro voters whereas 15 years ago there were none. The change occurred after 586 Negroes went to the courthouse in a body to register. One white man who flourished a gun was restrained by other more sensible white citizens.

In Jacksonville, when a highly qualified Negro attorney, Ernest D. Jackson, ran for justice of the peace he led the field of three candidates. He might have become the first Negro to hold office in Florida in modern times—but the Florida courts invalidated the election by holding the justice-of-the-peace set-up was illegal.

Mississippi

Negroes may register and vote freely in only six of the 82 counties in Mississippi, the Rev. John LaBauve, pastor of St. Gabriel Roman Catholic Church, reported.

As an example of what happens when they try to register, Father LaBauve cited Sunflower County. There Negroes were told by the registrar: "We'll have to wait until the state legislature adjourns; then we'll see about it."

In Humphreys County Mr. A. approached the registrar. The registrar informed him that the "registration problem" had caused bloodshed once in Humphreys County and advised him not to try.

In other areas, Negroes are afraid of loss of employment and loss of credit if they try to register.

The Mississippi report was prepared by Father LaBauve, Aaron Henry, executive secretary of the Mississippi Regional Council of Negro Leadership, Albert L. Powell, president of the Mississippi Progressive Voters League, and other leaders in the Mississippi right-to-vote movement.

Georgia

Denial of voting rights to Negroes in Georgia is a problem mainly in the rural areas, reported Austin T. Walden, noted Atlanta civil rights attorney. He said about 160,000 out of a potential 650,000 Negroes are registered throughout the state, with registration concentrated in the urban areas.

Speaking of the rural sections, he said:

'In the immediate past, lives have been lost and property practically confiscated. Negroes have been driven out of the community, their homes fired into at night, because of their efforts to register and vote. . .

"Candor and fairness demand that it be stated that the evils complained of are not really sanctioned by the great majority of the people of our state. It is the political demagogues who cause the trouble. . .

"It should be said that the greatest obstacle in the way of registration of Negroes arises from the indifference and timidity on the part of too large a segment of the Negro people of Georgia. . ."

South Carolina

Determined court action by the NAACP has practically eliminated voting restrictions in South Carolina, reported Mrs. Modjeska Simkins, long-time civil rights leader and former secretary of the NAACP conference in that state.

Even in the historic trouble spots—for example Abbeville County, site of the most atrocious lynching in the history of South Carolina—leaders of the voter-registration drives anticipate no trouble.

Mrs. Simkins said at least two white leaders had explained the change to her by saying: "These people have been sued so much that they are afraid of being carried to court."

She said the chief blocks to registration now are disinterest and a carry-over of a fear of reprisal because of the situation in previous years.

In one county, Williamsburg, restrictions still exist. There a graduate of Howard University, numerous teachers, and other educated Negroes have been turned down on a literacy test. If this situation does not change, Mrs. Simkins said, officials can be sure they will get another lawsuit.

THIS IS PART OF CROWD, estimated by Washington newspapers at more than 1,000, at the Conference on Voting Restrictions. They listen as Charles G. Gomillion makes the report for Alabama. At right, Eastland Committee investigator hides face.

Virginia

Of approximately 750,000 Negroes in Virginia, only slightly more than 80,000 are qualified to vote, but the greatest restrictions against voting are not legal but sociological and psychological.

This was reported by W. Hale Thompson from Newport News, Va., one of the state's leading civil rights attorneys. He is on the legal staff of the Virginia Conference of NAACP.

Thompson told of a Mr. J., a Negro who was a leader in the fight first for school equalization and later for integrated schools and in efforts to get his people qualified to vote. After the 1954 Supreme Court decision, he was ordered to leave the farm he had rented and worked for 20 years. He was able to rent another farm, but after two years the same thing happened. He finally had to leave the county but is still working to get Negroes registered.

In another county in Southside Virginia, Mr. W. was a prominent preacher and farmer. Each year he borrowed money to operate his farm and repaid it after the crops were sold. Then Mr. W. announced he was going to run for one of three seats on the County Board of Supervisors; the next day he was asked to pay his creditors over $8,000. Mr. W. aged 20 years within a few weeks and finally withdrew from the race.

Despite the handicaps, Thompson pointed out that a greater percentage of qualified Negroes usually go to the polls in Virginia than do the qualified whites.

North Carolina

Voting restrictions are not nearly so prevalent in North Carolina as in some other Southern states, and there is little or no problem in the larger cities, reported Miss Willson Whitman, author and editor of Southern Pines, N.C.

But in some rural areas, obstacles to registration still exist. Miss Whitman cited cases in the northeastern part of the state, notably in Northhampton and Halifax Counties, where so-called literacy tests have been used to disqualify Negro voters. Miss Whitman pointed out that such tests are never used with white registrants. The tests are now being challenged in the courts.

"The great trouble is not winning such cases on appeal," Miss Whitman said. "It is the need for litigation and appeal, the expenditure of time and money required to invoke the whole machinery of the law. Now it's being said that action in current cases can't be expected before May, and in May registration in North Carolina ends for the fall elections."

SCEF plans to publish the reports on voting restrictions in pamphlet form. Put together, the nine reports present a comprehensive and dramatic picture of the current situation on voting restrictions throughout the region. Publication date will be announced later.

If you would like to help defray the cost of publishing this important document, please send a contribution earmarked for this purpose to SCEF, 822 Perdido St., New Orleans 12, La.